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TS #185856

1 June 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

REFERENCE: Very sensitive memo noting the possibility of the employment of SAC B-52s for saturation attack on a suspected Viet Cong concentration north and west of the South Vietnamese town of Kontum

SUBJECT : Probable reactions to this attack with special reference to the employment of SAC B-52s against airfields in the DRV. (See our SMIE 10-6-65 -- which will be before the USIB tomorrow.)

1. A SAC heavy bomber strike on suspect VC concentrations northwest of Kontum (in South Vietnam) which occurred after a SAC raid on airfields in the Hanoi-Haiphong area of North Vietnam would produce relatively little additional reaction from Hanoi, Peiping, or Moscow over and above that already produced by the strike on these sensitive North Vietnamese targets, though there would almost certainly be some supplementary propaganda outcry over this fresh evidence of "imperialist aggression."

2. If such a SAC strike on targets within South Vietnam occurred before SAC had been employed against

~~SENSITIVE~~



TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

targets north of the 17th Parallel, the reaction picture would be a little different. US aircraft (both land and carrier based) are already conducting intensive bombing missions within South Vietnam, however, so even here the new ingredient would not be the nature of the target or the severity of the bombardment but, simply, the fact of SAC's participation. The SAC flight from base to target (and any concomitant increase in SAC's world-wide readiness posture) would probably produce some short-term heightening of tension the nature and impact of which would depend in large measure on how soon the Communists picked up evidence of SAC's mission and how Peiping and, especially, Moscow read SAC's overall intent.

3. After the raid, there would probably be increased apprehension in Peiping and especially Moscow that this use of US strategic forces foreshadowed a general escalation. Such apprehension would be shared in a number of Free World capitals (e.g., Paris, London, Rome, and Tokyo) where press comment would be extensive and generally hostile, and some adverse reaction at the governmental level would almost certainly be registered.

- 2 -

SENSITIVE

4. The raid itself, though it might temporarily disrupt VC tactical plans, would have no particular effect on their military strategy or their basic timetable. It might, however, heighten the urgency of Hanoi's requests to Peiping and Moscow for air defense support. Such a raid would almost certainly prompt new Communist propaganda warnings and would probably impel some Western countries (e.g., France and perhaps the UK) to step up diplomatic activity designed to promote early negotiations.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

- 3 -

SENSITIVE